

ISSN 1597 - 8540

*Journal of Applied  
Education*

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*And*

*Vocational Research*

*Volume 13 / Number 4 / October 2016*

*Official Journal of the College of Applied Education  
and Vocational Technology,  
Tai Solarin University of Education,  
Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria.*

# Globalisation and Cultural Identity: Reviving Traditional Dances in Post-Colonial Public Schools As A Panacea for The Erosion of Indigenous Value Systems

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## Abstract

*Globalisation and the subsequent eroding of national and cultural borders, especially in relation to cultural autonomy have produced ambivalent developments. It has been argued that its canon of mutual exchangeability of values is not reflected in practice and this argument is predicated on the fact that the cultural traffic continues to flow from the western societies to the rest of the World in a manner that reinforces the neo-colonial domination which Globalisation sets out to diminish, in the first instance. Consequently, it has become a matter of urgency that affected societies revisit the concept of Globalization with a view to reappraising its benefits and devise a roadmap that ensures the two-way traffic between the West and the rest of the world that reflects this canon of mutual exchange, otherwise, it becomes imperative that policies be put in place that would preserve the cultural autonomy and identity of affected societies. This paper makes a case for the resuscitation of the dying traditions of cultural dances in public schools as one of the avenues of strengthening moral values and engendering cultural identity among the youth of post-colonial societies in the age of Globalization. The study employs the theory of post-colonialism as a conceptual approach of discussion. The research is expected to contribute*

*to the knowledge towards the search for social and national identity, concepts which are under the imminent threat of Globalizing forces.*

**Keywords: Globalisation, Post-Colonial, Ambivalent Traditional, Cultural education**

### **Introduction**

It's been over twenty years since John Mbiti (1977) the religion ethnographer claimed that "dance is a reflection of the worldview of every given community". He opined that the African is a deeply religious being who sees in everything he does and experiences, an intervention or influence of the supernatural. According to Mbiti, African people look upon the world as a religious universe in which to live and which is also considered as an abode of the ancestors. This outlook may have changed today in the wake of the age of globalisation, as the lyrics of popular songs in Africa which accompany dances now differ significantly from the earlier tradition which reflected the autonomous identity of cultural groups. While performance in the past highlighted religious beliefs and taboos, the advent of Globalisation has impacted on the local culture in a manner that has led to the stripping of popular songs and performance of reflective, philosophical values which guide and sustain the social equilibrium of groups. Globalization is defined as the increased inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of different societies on the global level initiated by the breaking down of national boundaries through communication, travel and trade advancement (Hensley 2014). But what is the implication of this phenomenon for the cultural preservation of autonomous groups within the post-colonial societies such as Nigeria? The culture of a given group is the totality of socially learned customs, knowledge, material objects and behaviour which are transmitted through generations, and embraces ideas and values, customs and also the artifacts of an autonomous group (Schaefer, 2002). Culture may thus be understood as a unique pattern of communal or social activity and the objects and signs that validate their lifestyle. It is the summation of the acquired knowledge system evolved by a group which helps them to address the challenges of their immediate environment. As a uniting phenomenon,

culture implants order into the social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms, thereby distinguishing the group from their neighbours. Culture is transmitted laterally or from one generation to another, or horizontally which implies transmission from one society to another through such agents as globalization.

We now need examine the implication of globalization for the abundant and rich cultural heritage of the various, diverse ethnic groups of post-colonial societies in general and Nigeria in particular. The tangible artifacts such as cultural monuments, artwork and cultural landscapes may be preserved in museums but the intangible ones are in imminent danger of extinction because they depend on their continued practice and relevance for survival. Most of the cultures of post-colonial societies have been lost to the forces of imperialism and what is left continues to depreciate under the influence of Westernization. The cultures of post-colonial societies have struggled in the midst of the neocolonial hybridity to hold on to the remaining vestiges of cultural identity and the emergence of globalisation may well be the undoing of this struggle to salvage cultural identity. Akande (2002) opines that globalization of cultural heritage has some negative impacts which he Western world's agenda to undermine the cultural heritage of various peoples around the world through colonization, imperialism and now globalization. He believes that cultural imperialism left the colonized in a state of cultural disorientation thereby achieving vulnerable to cultural invasion.

Unfortunately, apart from activities of private organizations and individual activities on the internet, not much effort has been made by the government to globalize Nigerian culture. This is in spite of the negative impact of globalization on cultural norms and the effect on the socialization processes and values. The effect is seen in the dressing culture of the youth and the difficulty for parents and guardians to enforce moral guidance, faced with the challenge of global popular culture. The traditional pattern of subordination to elders is becoming extinct as many elite families pander to the prerequisite requirement of Mathematics and English for entrance to the higher institutions and hardly show interest in the cultural or moral education of the youth.

Our values and customs, most of which are encoded in dance and music and which were undocumented, have been distorted, some lost and many become extinct; taking with them experiences, insight, methodologies and philosophies which have sustained African societies for centuries. The western agents of the mass media, urbanization and religion have all contributed to further erode indigenous culture. The need to survive in an increasingly mechanized world, with fast paced changes has led practitioners of oral performances to turn to the more urgent need for physical survival. Ideological sentiments cannot survive in the face of pragmatic demands and so the traditional homesteads have been abandoned by young men who would have, in the traditional setting, inherited the art of their fathers. Dance instruments have been abandoned in the goat sheds of family huts, and dance arenas converted into modern tap water sites to lure riverine communities and attract community votes for artists-turned-politicians.

Friere (1970) has described this intrusion by Western culture on traditional values as a cultural invasion. Christianity, the western moralizing agent, discourages traditional dance in any form and it has been relentless in its scourge of dances which feature in religious worship. Particularly in Nigeria, the decline of traditional dance forms goes beyond the loss of the aesthetics and entertainment. As Robert Nicholls stresses,

Indigenous cultures are functional social instruments which have been developed over the centuries to meet practical needs. In non-literate societies, art forms contained a mosaic of information and skills for coping with a variety of environments many of which are extreme. They serve indigenous cultures and are functional not so much as artifact and as an end in itself, but more as a process, a means to an end. (pg.42)

Citing the *Igede* dance of Nigeria's Benue State, Nicholls notes the effect of modernity on this traditional performance form which is hardly ever

performed nowadays because critical social changes are leading to the demise of many traditional customs which engender dance. Experiences, insights, and methodologies preserved in these customs have sustained African communities for generations and could well be lost to future generations because of the fragility of oral traditions. He laments the cumulative negative impact of the so called modernizing agents such as education, mass media, religion and urbanization. These, he believes are responsible for the erosion of indigenous priorities, attributing greater blame to the insensitivity of the mass media which promotes an urban bias against traditional forms. To cap these problems, the adult populations are being lured increasingly to the cities in search of new means of self-sustenance. With patronage and interest diminished, the elders are left with no pupils to tutor as the able-bodied youth have abandoned their dances and drums in the village. The youth, passionate lovers of the new ways and staunch disciples of modernization, promote and emulate the pop culture of western countries and the consequence is self-negativism and the imminent erosion of traditional moral values.

Currently, what is available in the national archives are materials that have managed through sheer tenacity to survive the onslaught of modernizing trends and the imperialist control which demanded that indigenes do away with religious art, emblems and practices which were tagged barbaric by the missionaries.

More devastating is the practice of embryonic divisions of autonomous cultural units currently ongoing in Nigeria which often merges culturally incompatible groups. This phenomenon is a major cause of psycho-social crises, arising from the dilution of cultural identities, and the extinction of cultural consciousness in smaller groups as they are subsequently absorbed into larger ones. The situation spells a bleak future for those performances which serve as a binding cord and a source of cultural pride as well as ethnographic link of groups. According to Nichols, in an attempt to foster national unity, many African countries are making efforts to promote national unity through a showcase of traditional dances. He cites this effort by the Nigerian

government in one of the All Nigerian Festival of Arts, the hosting of which was rotated between the states,

in which people of different religions, culture, customs and languages can meet to perform their traditional dances music....and different ethnic groups are merged! (p.46)

The result of this exercise where hundreds of ethnic groups are grouped into incompatible ensembles, all performing at once, impromptu rehearsed pieces in very limited time, is grotesque, not just because of the insufficient time limit but also the disjointed appearance of the whole performance. More unfortunate is the need of the participants to compete, which forces artists to construct garish costumes and include outlandish acrobatic displays for otherwise solemn and often religious dances in order to please foreign spectators and enjoy momentary applause from the audience.

Finally, a most urgent problem is the absence of the performance of traditional dances, which used to be synonymous with the end of the school year in the past, and which is almost nonexistent nowadays. Under-funded government institutions and the advent of privately run schools had long drawn away parents and children. In their new European modeled schools, children are discouraged from speaking their mother tongue, tagged vernacular, with the result that their knowledge of their traditional language is lost. Parents want high scores in the national examinations, so moral instruction is not on the priority list and with no cultural norms to guide the young, African's youth is almost entirely lost to the lure of Western acculturation. In the face of these threats, cultural institutions such as libraries, museums as well as ministries will need to adopt digitalization in the storage of non-tangible artifacts such as dances and oral literature.

More importantly, our cultural heritage should be visible in the sense that it should be included in the national education curriculum to save our youth from the amorphous global culture which is leading to the psychological mental crisis of confusion in of the affected societies. In

this sense, the future begins now, since it is the activities of today which will yield the fruits of tomorrow and without access to practical cultural heritage such as traditional dances as it was practiced in the pre-globalization era, it would be difficult for the youth to identify with their cultural past- an important symbol of their identities. For these reasons the digitization, preservation and accessibility of cultural values remain a enormous task for library professionals.

According to (Carden 2008) increased globalization creates a winner-take-all market for cultural visibility and he refers to it as the double-edged sword which is capable of enabling national cultures to revitalize their values in the face of competition with other cultures. The challenge is for artists, authors and creators of technologies to better position themselves in the use of these technological tools to enhance their cultural visibility. The national libraries in Nigeria should take on the task of repackaging their cultural dances with innovative choreographies in order to meet international standard without distorting the content of the performance forms.

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### **Conclusion**

It is apparent that the most urgent need towards the preservation of culture is the provision of enabling facilities for the rural community as cultural information is better accessed by those who have facilities for internet or satellite television viewing. It is important that the villages and localities where these dances come from are given opportunities of



viewership to further strengthen their cultural pride through inclusion and thereby encourage a re-identification with their roots. In the globalized society most people are shaped by exposure to multicultural phenomena which has led to the hybridity of identities. As a concept of uniformity, globalisation preaches the mantra of a world without borders but in practice, it would appear that the old rules of immigration still prevail in favour of the western world who need little or no effort to enter third world countries, while the exact opposite is the case for third world community members seeking entrance into the Western geopolitical zones; and yet globalisation enthusiasts continue to assume that the world is one happy village of borderless interaction.

Globalization has led to the instability of families and communities and produced socially unstable youth and all these being the result of the rapid erosion of our absolute traditional values. Rather than abhor technology, it can be used to promote our culture through the aforementioned approaches. The rejection of advanced information technology or globalization is not a solution for overcoming its disintegrating effects; rather, it may be employed as an avenue of national integration.

The most significant task in ensuring cultural stability is the need for the federal government to revive the inclusion of moral instructions and cultural performance in the education curricular, and also preserve these in libraries, promote through mass media, and enhance visibility through advanced information technologies to counter negative changes that are emerging today. There is no human community which will want to reject technological changes or globalization, and there is no question of return to the traditional pattern of community lifestyle, (even if we want it) because new ways are evolving every day that are generating new dynamics of interaction and growth.

Perhaps, as Egwu, Eze, and Asogwa (2011) have suggested there is the need to establish "heritage club" where issues of cultural heritage would be discussed as a means of transmission of oral and intangible heritage while an international World Day for showcasing and safeguarding traditional cultural heritage should be established. In addition, it will help to hold seminars, workshops and technical assistance for the

specialized training of managers and instructors in the field of traditional culture and heritage.

Finally, the conservation and dissemination of expressions of the intangible cultural heritage should continue to be an important component of our national libraries.

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